

Mineral King

comprehensive management plan
sequoia/kings canyon national parks/california
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A visit to Mineral King takes visitors through the full range of Sierran environments. The trip begins in the foothills of the southern Sierra, an area of chaparral-covered hillsides and scattered oak woodlands.

Following the road as it climbs in elevation, visitors gradually enter a forest environment dominated by the giant sequoias of the Atwell Mill grove. Summer cabins, rustic lodges, eating places, and campgrounds provide accommodations for a leisurely stay in this forested recreational setting.

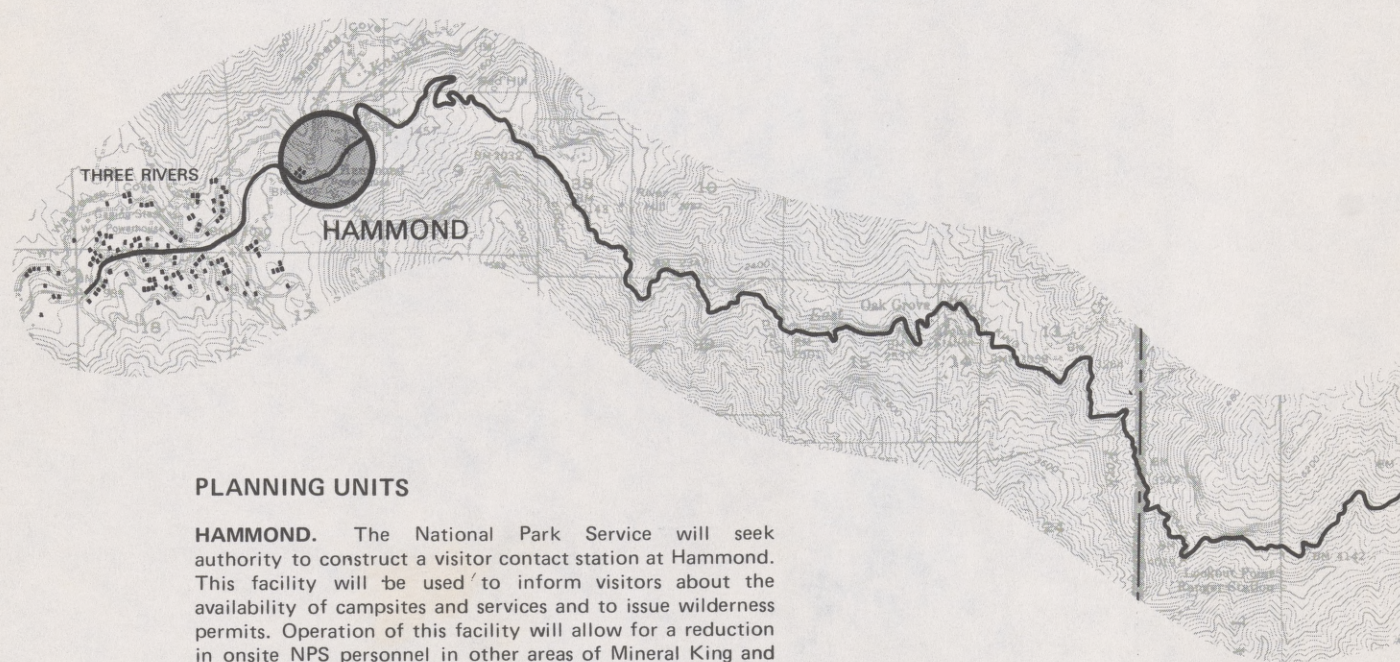


Still climbing, the road emerges from the forest canopy into the panoramic landscape of an open alpine valley enhanced by vistas of rugged mountain peaks and rushing high-country streams. This is the destination of most visitors, who come to hike, backpack, and ride horses into the backcountry, or simply to enjoy the alpine environment from the roadside.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RATIONALE

Mineral King offers many of the scenic attractions and natural features scattered throughout other areas of the Sierra Nevada. The availability of a variety of environments seemingly presents an ideal situation for visitor use. However, Mineral King is a relatively small area of compact forms, and this scale imposes a constraint on planning for visitor activities.

The recommended objective for Mineral King is to provide an alternative experience for park visitors, in contrast to the experience offered at more highly developed areas of Sequoia and Kings Canyon. The actions detailed for the various developed areas are intended to maintain the current pattern, density, and level of public use and to retain the traditional character of Mineral King.



PLANNING UNITS

HAMMOND. The National Park Service will seek authority to construct a visitor contact station at Hammond. This facility will be used to inform visitors about the availability of campsites and services and to issue wilderness permits. Operation of this facility will allow for a reduction in onsite NPS personnel in other areas of Mineral King and will provide some control over traffic on the road.

CABIN COVE. No actions are proposed for this area. Permit cabins will remain for the lifetime of the owner of record.

FACULTY FLAT. Faculty Flat will be managed as a threshold to the alpine environment. Activities occurring in this area will remain. Specific actions will include replacing the ranger station in its present location and expanding the Coldspring campground. The new ranger station will be used to provide information and orientation services, and it will also allow for the collection and display of artifacts relating to the historical periods of Mineral King. It is recommended that existing campsites in the Coldspring campground be rehabilitated and that 12 new sites be added in the vicinity of Mosquito Creek. This will provide management with the option of designating individual campsites for short-term use by backpackers and provide sufficient additional spaces to satisfy peak demand. Permit cabins will remain for the lifetime of the owner of record.

THE VALLEY. The addition of Mineral King Valley to Sequoia and Kings Canyon parks offers for the first time an easily accessible alpine environment for visitor use. The valley will be managed as the outstanding natural feature of the Mineral King study area. Due to inherent environmental factors, including avalanche hazards, sensitive deer fawning areas, and aesthetic value, it is the conclusion of the planning effort that the valley should be kept free of new development. Existing trails will be used to create an interpretive loop trail that will extend from Faculty Flat to points of interest in the valley. Use of existing parking areas will be controlled so as not to exceed the 200-car capacity. Permit cabins will remain for the lifetime of the owner of record. The pack station will remain in its present location.

THE INTENT OF THIS PLAN

Mineral King was added to Sequoia National Park by passage of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-625). The intent of Congress was to ensure the preservation of the natural and scenic features of Mineral King for present and future generations and to enhance public enjoyment of the area. One provision of the act required preparation of a comprehensive management plan. Citing specific authorities applicable to the National Park Service in general and Sequoia National Park in particular, Congress recognized that a framework for the management of Mineral King already existed. The remaining concerns related principally to questions of visitor use. Therefore, the focus of the planning effort has been to examine various types and levels of recreational opportunities that could be offered in the area consistent with sound environmental practices.

The recommendations presented in this document were derived from a series of planning alternatives that were reviewed by the public in October 1979. The consensus reached at that time indicated that no major new development should take place at Mineral King and that provisions for visitor use should remain essentially unchanged. The recommendations presented in this document comprise a plan which if approved will carry out this intent.

Your comments on these recommendations are welcome, and they will be carefully considered during the preparation of the final plan. The public review period will remain open until August 30, 1980. Please address your comments to

Superintendent's Office
Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
Ash Mountain
Three Rivers, California 93271

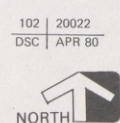
An *Environmental Assessment* that analyzes the alternatives considered during the course of this planning effort is available for review at the park headquarters in Ash Mountain.



ENVIRONMENT

MINERAL KING

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ACCESS

The Mineral King road was originally constructed in 1879, and it remains engineered to standards of that era. Short of a complete reconstruction and realignment, there appears to be little that can be done to improve access. Such action is not recommended; consequently, the road will be maintained at its existing standard and capacity. The only improvements will be for the purpose of reducing erosion. The unpaved portions of the road will be surfaced with a suitable material, and minor drainage improvements will be made.

WINTER USE

Traditional use of the area for winter recreation will continue unchanged.

BACKCOUNTRY USE

Mineral King has long functioned as a staging area for access to the backcountry of Sequoia National Park and adjacent Sequoia National Forest. Use of the backcountry will be held to a daily quota consistent with trail capacities and the stability of the backcountry ecosystem.

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation at Mineral King will focus on the subalpine and alpine ecosystems, since those environments are not generally accessible for onsite interpretation in the remainder of Sequoia and Kings Canyon. Related subthemes include other aspects of the natural environment and the rich and varied human history of Mineral King. Aside from the facility proposed at the Faculty Flat ranger station, the interpretive program will rely on personal services rather than facility development.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

As a district within Sequoia National Park, Mineral King is subject to the resource management goals and objectives developed and approved in the *Natural Resources Management Plan* for the park. Many of the objectives of that plan are relevant to management of resources at Mineral King, including the management of vegetation, fire, wildlife, and aquatic resources. However, certain resources need to be given special consideration independent of the park's management plan. These include the Mineral King deer herd and four alpine lakes that have been dammed. Transferring the area from the administration of the U.S. Forest Service to the National Park Service precluded hunting. As a result, a program has been initiated with the cooperation of the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Forest Service to monitor the population dynamics of the deer herd in the absence of hunting. This analysis will continue, requiring continued consultation with the California Department of Fish and Game. The management strategy will be dependent on the data produced by the monitoring program. Regarding the dammed lakes, it is recommended that no action be taken. A significant impact is not caused by retaining the dams; therefore, they should continue to function to ensure a dry season water flow for the purposes of power generation downstream.

WILDERNESS

It is apparent from the actions recommended in the proposal that lands above 8,000 feet elevation could qualify for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Following completion of the management plan, the steps necessary to seek legislation for formal wilderness designation will be initiated. In the interim, the lands above 8,000 feet will be managed to ensure the preservation of their inherent wilderness values.

LAND ACQUISITION AND PERMITTEE PROPERTIES

Acquisition of private property and the eventual disposition of permit cabins will be carried out in accordance with the policies prescribed by Congress in the authorizing legislation. Basically, private property will be acquired as funds become available, and retained use and occupancy reservations will be granted at the discretion of the owners. Permit cabins will remain for the lifetime of the owner of record.

A PROPOSAL FOR THE FUTURE

Since public attitudes regarding the use of park lands are continuously changing, plans normally provide direction for only a specified period of time, typically 10 to 15 years. The preceding recommendation serves that function. However, the principles established in the enabling legislation require that some consideration be given to the future use of acquired properties and the disposition of permit cabins once these permits expire.

The National Park Service is committed to the long-term goal of eventually removing development from environmentally sensitive areas and consolidating all visitor services and support facilities at Faculty Flat and Silver City. Silver City will continue to offer commercial services and overnight accommodations, as appropriate. It will also serve as the NPS administrative, housing, and maintenance center, and as acquisition of private properties proceeds, buildings acquired at Silver City may be adaptively used for these functions.

Faculty Flat will continue to serve as the threshold for the valley with facilities for information and orientation, camping, trailhead parking, and a pack station. When additional developable land becomes available at Faculty Flat, the campground at Atwell Mill and the parking and pack station in the valley will be relocated to this area.

All of the cabins at Cabin Cove and in the valley will be removed when their permits expire. Eventually, these areas and Atwell Mill will be restored to natural conditions.

STUDY TEAM

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United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

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